

Lessons Learned from the Drouth, Wind and Frost of 1918 in Saskatchewan

By HON. W. R. MOTHERWELL

LESSONS FROM DROUTH

- (1) That, contrary to popular opinion, two dry years or even more may follow in succession.
- (2) That there is no telling when the next dry year is going to come.
- (3) That it is always good business to prepare for a bad year and hope for a good one.
- (4) That no known country in the world can grow as much crop on as little rainfall as Western Canada.
- (5) That from a half to an average crop of wheat can be grown on good, early ploughed clay fallow in spite of the worst drouth we have yet seen.
- (6) That with a rightly prepared summerfallow seed bed, 25 bushels of wheat per acre can be, and has been, grown on two inches of current rainfall.
- (7) That scanty as our precipitation is, half of us do not take half care of it.
- (8) That a grain farmer might as well face a western winter without proper clothing, shelter or fuel, as face a south-western summer without a good, early ploughed fallow.
- (9) That either as regards weed eradication or moisture conservation ploughing the fallow in July or August and harrowing it in the fall or not at all, is not summerfallowing, but merely early fall ploughing.
- (10) That the term "summer" fallow is misleading and unfortunate and might be better called "spring" fallow, so far as the ploughing is concerned.
- (11) That the man who waits for rain before ploughing his fallow is like the man who puts his rain barrel up after the shower is over.
- (12) That the plough should be let down a few notches deeper even though limited power necessitates it being set a few holes narrower.
- (13) That the man on the open plain who does not fallow at all or does it too late or too recklessly is inviting a call from an unwelcome guest—the sheriff.
- (14) That in our drier south-western areas too much seed sown to the acre is frequently the cause of crop failure.
- (15) That we can no longer afford to divide up our meagre rainfall with so many hungry and thirsty weeds.

(16) That we all must farm better to get better results, whether we farm more acres or not.

(17) That a lesser acreage well tilled often means more bushels than a greater acreage poorly tilled.

(18) That farmers have too many theoretical long distance advisers and too few real candid friends.

(19) That the national campaign for "Greater Production" by the sowing of "every possible acre," without any warning as to quality of work performed, is unwise, unsound and unfortunate and only indulged in by well-meaning, but very superficial observers.

(20) That government seed grain on credit, comparative absence of weeds and the phenomenal crop in south-west Saskatchewan in 1915, are the three worst enemies of some expectant grain farmers.

(21) That if any further government or municipal seed grain distribution is found desirable in the drier portions of Saskatchewan it should be confined to properly prepared year-old breaking or early ploughed fallow, as compliance with these conditions would itself soon cure this seed grain malady.

(22) That sowing seed into dry soil is too risky as it may not germinate till harvest time or at least till too late for a crop.

(23) That experience has proven that over a period of say ten or twelve years, better aggregate returns can be gotten from a given acreage in many parts of south-western Saskatchewan by fallowing half of it every other year and cropping the alternate year, than by any other known system.

(24) That grain farming 30, 40 and 50 miles from a railway keeps a man on the road so much that it soon puts him "on the road."

(25) That drouth in a country with such a short growing season and rich soil as ours is frequently a great blessing when well provided against, but when not properly prepared for is a terrible scourge.

LESSONS FROM SPRING WINDS

(1) That conservation of soil moisture to the limit, when not accompanied by some form of soil conservation itself, sometimes results in crop, soil, and everything movable, being scattered to and by the four winds of heaven.

(2) That one of the penalties of exclusive grain growing is the ravages of wind on our fibre-depleted soils after long periods of successive grain cropping and fallowing.

(3) That to avoid this some form of "binder" must be restored to the soil similar to what we found in it in its original virginity.

(4) That while seeding down to grass is a positive cure for drifting soils, many while aiming at this are not yet ready to grow grass, but recognise its necessity.

(5) That a very successful expedient for seeding down drifty clay soil may be found by sowing winter rye instead of spring wheat in the

August of the year the land is fallowed, by deep cultivating such land early in spring prior to seeding or by spreading on the fallow after ploughing five or six loads of well rotted manure to the acre to act as a soil-binder.

(6) That if no precaution is taken to keep heavy clay fallow land from drifting in the spring, especially on an early spring, greater and greater damage is bound to ensue as the years go by.

(7) That while various expedients to prevent wind ravages to crops may tide us over for a while longer, the real cure is more grass, fencing, and live stock, and more permanency in our general agriculture.

(8) That while the ordinary drag harrow is one of the most important, most despised and least understood of all farm implements, it should not be used in the spring on soils predisposed to soil drifting.

LESSONS FROM SUMMER AND AUTUMN FROSTS

(1) That very few districts in Saskatchewan can be said to be entirely immune from the danger of summer or autumn frosts.

(2) That some districts, however, are more immune than others.

(3) That this known fact should, to some extent, govern us in the choice of crops we grow, and to what extent we grow grain exclusively, or diversify with live stock.

(4) That it is better for both the individual and the state for one to grow first class coarse grains than fifth or sixth class wheat.

(5) That a farmer should not allow his better judgment to be swayed into growing wheat, because the country is at war, when he knows full well that his particular locality and particular farm was better adapted for growing something else.

(6) That it is high time Saskatchewan had a complete survey made of its agricultural and live stock possibilities, showing the adaptability of its various distinctive areas, for the guidance of prospective as well as present settlers.

(7) That the organisation of the free range area in the north and north-east of the province was a move in the right direction, and with some modifications, may be made the basis of a great revival of the live stock industry; thus not only avoiding the ravages of summer frost as it disastrously affects the exclusive wheat grower, but also developing a profitable industry that a hungry world is sadly depleted of at present.

(8) That in view of the next preceding statement, the activities of the Live Stock Branch of the Provincial Department of Agriculture in the sale and distribution of live stock should be preferentially directed to this free range area.

